

A Letter to Mao Tse-tung

By William Z. Foster

As the "Year of the Great Leap Forward," 1958, drew to a close, William Z. Foster sent a personal letter of congratulations and analysis to Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Communist Party of China. Shortly thereafter, an acknowledgment and commentary upon this letter arrived from Mao; this exchange, which we know will be of great interest to our readers, is published below in full.—
The Editor.

December 19, 1958

Mao Tse-tung

Chairman,

Chinese Communist Party

Dear Comrade and Friend,

May I extend my heartiest congratulations to the great Chinese people and its Communist Party, through you, for the glowing success of your tremendous revolution, which is now inspiring the world. I am sorry that I have not been able to come and visit your country in person, hence I am taking this occasion to express these greetings through this letter. I am 78 years old; I have been confined to my room for the past 14 months with a paralytic stroke; and I am held under two police indictments, each of them carrying penalties of from five to ten years in prison—so my chances of getting to revolutionary China are pretty slim, although I have not given up my efforts to get a passport, that will enable me to visit the countries of Socialism. Incidentally, I hope to get better medical treatment in these

countries than I can possibly get here in the United States.

Although you undoubtedly know it, the Chinese, principally workers, have played a very considerable role in the history of the Western part of the United States. They began to immigrate into this area in the early 1850's, at the time of the famous Gold Rush in California. From then on, they were to be found for many decades in all the mining camps, lumber woods, ranches, and construction works of the great West. They built the principal railroads of California, and particularly they constructed, in the latter 1860's, the western half of the Central Pacific Railroad, the first transcontinental railroad in America, an heroic achievement. They had to contend with much chauvinism, intimidation, and violence, which reached its heights during the 1880's, when the National Exclusion Act was passed, which, rigidly enforced, practically stopped all immigration from Asia. This treatment was characteristic of how

American capitalists have always treated national minorities, worst of all those of a different color, such as the American Indians, Negroes, Japanese, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Filipinos, etc. In the early years of the immigration, as many as 100,000 Chinese came in one year to the United States. There are still, despite highly restrictive governmental policies, about 118,000 Chinese in the United States, and small colonies of them, occasionally marked with distinctive Chinese architecture and customs, are to be found in such leading cities as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, and New York. These masses, as you know, have been profoundly stirred by the Chinese Revolution.

As an American worker, I am ashamed of the outrageous policy of intimidation, employed by the great monopolies which control the imperialistic government of the United States, to try to strangle the Chinese Revolution, and to prevent the Chinese people from carrying forward their heroic achievements in the building of Socialism and Communism. In the domineering relationship that the United States is trying to force upon China in the Taiwan Straits, and in its general support of the Chiang Kai-shek bandits, is to be found a true reflection of a brutal imperialism which until recently was enforced all over Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but which is now rapidly being ended by the rise of the Chinese, Indian,

African and Latin-American peoples of those areas.

What insolence the American imperialists have, to try to force such a policy as they now have towards China. They would cry out in wild indignation if any power were to attempt such outrages in their ports and against their country as they are daily practicing against People's China. They have brought their battleships to the very coast of China; they are attempting to bomb, capture, and hold Chinese cities; they are carrying through an unparalleled economic blockade; they are trying to bar the Chinese people from proper representation in the United Nations; they keep the threat of imperialist war hanging constantly over the heads of the Chinese people, struggling in a heroic fashion to free themselves from the poverty and misery which grew out of the tyranny and oppression of the past.

But the Chinese people, in their swiftly growing strength, can afford to laugh at these gymnastics of the "paper tiger." They know that the American blockade and war threats cannot possibly prevent the growth of Chinese Socialism. Particularly do the imperialists know that they are powerless against the international solidarity of the Socialist world, headed by the Soviet Union, and of which People's China is such a vital part. Immense China is irresistibly expanding, and all the power of world imperialism cannot stop it. Before long, the United States will find itself in an entirely untenable

position with relation to People's China. It must retreat; already it is learning that its erstwhile policy of counter-revolution against China, is full of disaster to itself. Throughout America, there is a strong and growing resentment against the Eisenhower-Dulles-Truman anti-Chinese policy. This was undoubtedly a powerful factor in the decisive political defeat of the Eisenhower Republicans in the November, 1958 elections. The expanding conviction is that these policies must end in disaster for the United States unless they are rescinded. Already there are vast numbers of Americans, not only workers, but large sections of other classes as well, who realize that the United States has got hold of the unconquerable Chinese Dragon by the tail, and the sooner it lets go the better for itself.

A deplorable feature of the situation, is the insufficient level of resistance, developed by the American working class against this imperialistic abuse of the Chinese people. As you know, however, the important trade unions of America are headed by men who have no Socialist ideology, and who have not even built a Labor Party. Frequently, they are as violent war-mongers as the capitalists themselves. Their sense of international solidarity, especially towards Socialist peoples and people generally who have suffered from imperialist oppression, is very low. Nevertheless, during the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, there was a strong opposition waged by the ad-

vanced workers of the United States, under the leadership of the Communist Party, and in the face of unparalleled government oppression. The prestige of People's China is constantly and rapidly rising in the United States. American public opinion is in a state of continual amazement at the revolutionary achievements of the Chinese people.

During the past generation or so, the great question has been the swift Socialist development of the USSR, which has amazed the whole world. It has been my good fortune to have seen this revolutionary development from close up, having visited the Soviet Union thirteen times since the earliest days of the revolution. Now there is the spectacular Seven Year plan, which will surely give world Socialism an unprecedented shove ahead. It has been a great inspiration to watch the Socialist overtake the capitalist countries one after the other. Above all, is the realization of Lenin's slogan for "overtaking and surpassing" the United States by the Soviet Union. The meaning of this is clear for all to understand. It signifies the overcoming of the old capitalist world by the new world of Socialism. The USSR is blazing the way for the world, industrially, theoretically, culturally. Increasingly, those capitalists who are not utterly blinded by ignorance and hatred, are beginning to realize this. Now comes People's China, in its turn, to startle the world with its incredible growth in every constructive direction. Its long 25 years of bitter civil

and imperialist war, are bearing their final fruit of marvelous Socialist development. I must say that not only am I thrilled at the tremendous growth registered, but I am literally overwhelmed by it. The current "great leap forward" in China is simply studded with dazzling achievements, both industrial and agricultural. The perspective of China, which for decades was presumed to be hopelessly decrepit, now blazing ahead, with the perspective of surpassing Great Britain—once the outstanding leader of the capitalist world—in a very few years, is simply overwhelming in its revolutionary implications. I am especially intrigued by the new communes being set up throughout the country at the usual Chinese lightning-like pace. This undoubtedly will still further hasten the extremely rapid rate of Chinese revolutionization. But the wonder of the communes is matched largely by the marvelous democratization in steel, chemicals, agriculture, etc. that your people are bringing about. To one raised in a capitalist industrial country such as the United States, where the industries are so heavily massed in gigantic plants, it is hardly believable that the Chinese people could carry on such an enormous industry with such tiny units. And unless I am very much mistaken, the presence of these small units will hasten, not retard, the growth of the very largest and most efficient industrial plants. One can hardly imagine how far advanced the Chinese will be by the time the

historic Soviet Seven Year Plan is completed. With what enthusiasm the Chinese people are building Socialism, after having been robbed and abused so many years by the local exploiters and foreign imperialists! The American people can hardly be said to understand faintly, even, the tremendous events that are now taking place in the Socialization, and even the beginning of Communization, in China.

The United States, which looks with hostility, even though it does not understand what it sees, is notorious for the hatred with which it is treating People's China. This in spite of the fact that the American people as a whole have a kindly feeling for the Chinese masses. The dominant imperialists, however, are using every possible means to defeat the country and to prevent the growth of its industrial system. Underlying this hatred is real fear. The imperialists who own and govern the United States know very well that if they find it impossible, as they do, to dominate the world in the face of the militant USSR, they will find it doubly impossible when alongside of the Soviet Union, they have to confront a People's China at its side, doubly or triply strengthened by a few more years of growth. The continued expansion of the USSR and of People's China, will mean not only the growth of these two countries individually, but of world Socialism as such. The hopes of the American imperialists and their running dog, Chiang Kai-shek, are

more than foolish in thinking that People's China can be overthrown by an attack from the outside, and they are even more idiotic in believing that swiftly expanding China can be overthrown by an internal revolt.

In my opinion the combined Socialist countries are already much stronger than the combined imperialist countries. Perhaps the most definite sign of this is the ability of the Socialist countries, exercised for the last ten years, to prevent the imperialist countries from carrying out the general war that they have had so much in mind in this period. Undoubtedly, the imperialists, coming out of World War II, with no war damage done to the United States, with their monopoly of the atom bomb, with their enormous spread of an industrial and military machine, and with practically all the Socialist countries, including the USSR and China, deeply devastated by World War II, they thought they would have an easy time of it to knock out Socialism and to establish their American imperialist control throughout the world. But they were completely disappointed—the revolutionary people not only fought the imperialist armies, led by America, to a standstill in China, Korea, and Indo-China, but they also built up a powerful military machine of their own, and most of all they broke the atom bomb monopoly of the United States.

Altogether, they made it quite impossible for the imperialists to wage

their hoped-for world war. The latter could not have won such a war anyway; all they could have succeeded in doing was to bring about the destruction of the capitalist system and the spread of world Socialism. But they could have nevertheless largely devastated the world, which the Socialist peoples, as the elementary force of world peace, would have to prevent at all costs. This decisive defeat of the imperialists came to a head at the "summit" conference of 1955 in Geneva. In my opinion this defeat was basic for the capitalist system. The world task now, as I see it, is for the revolutionary forces to push ahead with the building of world Socialism, while at the same time they hold the capitalist warmongers in leash. Admittedly, this is an extremely difficult task. But it is a fatal process for the capitalist system. Peaceful coexistence must be fought for militantly.*

The capitalist general crisis grows more difficult. All the big capitalist countries are sick, and getting sicker, despite their war-bred prosperity and their Keynesian policies for meeting the cyclical economic crisis. In the United States, there are now well on to 4 million unemployed, and the whole economic system is shaky. There is real pessimism and confusion in the ranks of the capitalists,

* The *New York Times* in a dispatch from Hong Kong, citing this communication from Foster, "quoted" only this sentence and rendered the word "militantly" to read "militarily." A letter from Foster to the *Times* calling this "mistake" to the paper's attention was ignored by the Editor; but somewhat later, again in a dispatch dated Hong Kong, and well buried in a one-inch item, the *Times* made the correction.—Ed.

particularly since the launching of the Soviet Sputnik, and the sensations that were created here regarding the Soviet educational system and scientific progress. Never were the imperialists so deeply alarmed at the Soviet's progress as now. They know very well that they and their colleagues are now **incapable of running** the world. They do not dare even to think of what the situation will be once People's China really gets under full steam in its economic, political, and cultural development. No wonder that the churches are growing so rapidly; capitalism is turning more and more to prayer to try to save itself.

As things now are, and as will increasingly be the case, the Socialist countries and their allies now have the essential responsibility for leading the world. They are definitely responsible for saving it from the disasters created by a decaying capitalism which is trying to save itself, while they push ahead with their constructive Socialist program. They have to prevent imperialist war; they have to avert capitalist sabotage of the progress of the world: they have to shield mankind from the repeated disasters of economic crisis. They have to push through with the defense of the countries of Socialism and anti-colonialism; they have to bring about the industrialization of the less-developed countries; they have to increasingly civilize the world in many directions; they have to protect and advance the people in connection with the innumerable

tasks of world Socialism. They have to overcome capitalist pests that are undermining humanity.

In recent years, the world Socialist forces, and their tasks, grow more and more complicated, and yet more simple. The Socialist Revolution is proceeding along three major channels: First, there are the definitely Socialist countries, possessing political power, armed with Communist Parties, and guided by Marxism-Leninism—they are the real leaders of the Revolution. Second, there are the many anti-colonial countries that have broken from the imperialists; they are not as clear-sighted revolutionists as the first group, but they are essentially anti-imperialist in nature, and their masses are manifestly related politically to the Socialist countries rather than to the imperialist countries. Third, there are the mass democratic organizations in the capitalist countries—such as the workers' political parties, trade unions, cooperatives, women and youth organizations, peasant movements, national groups, etc., running to many scores of millions. These democratic bodies, often led by opportunists and possessing pro-capitalist programs, are not so easy, however, to identify as vital segments of the revolutionary movement, and this is too often not done. Despite their leadership, however, which is often anti-revolutionary, their masses are by their history and by their daily struggles a part of the fundamentally revolutionary movement. They reflect the revolution in the im-

perialist-capitalist countries. The clear-cut Socialist movement of the world should realize this fact more clearly and be more definitely guided by it. We must give concrete leadership to all three of these main channels of revolutionary, or potentially revolutionary, forces, no matter how different may be their immediate problems, leadership, programs, and tactics of struggle.

The United States, at least until the present time, has been one of the hardest lands in the world in which to build a Socialist movement—its difficulties are vastly different, for example, than those of China. The American labor movement dates back to the American Revolution, of 1776—in respect to some of its features, such as local labor papers, local labor parties, etc.—it is about as old, or even older, than that of Great Britain. I was practically raised in the labor movement. My first strike was in 1893; I joined the Socialist Party in 1900; I became a syndicalist in 1909; and I joined the Communist Party early in 1921. The United States got its first Marxists (German immigrants, many of them co-workers of Marx and Engels) in the 1850's, and its first Socialist Party was formed in 1876. During this long period, the country was notorious for the violence of the class struggle; many of the hardest fought strikes in the history of the industrial world took place in the United States. Time and again, the American working class, made up of innumerable racial and national groups, has proved its

splendid fighting qualities.

Meanwhile, the capitalist class has built a powerful and a relentless organization. With about one half of the production of the capitalist world, they have come to dominate the capitalist world very largely, they have constructed a huge capitalist system, and they would dominate the entire world, Socialist as well as capitalist, if they possessed the power to do so. But there is the greatest limit upon their power. With all their wealth and strength, they have not been able to bring the Socialist forces of the world under their control. Here is their fatal weakness, a think that will eventually bring about their ruin.

Under these harsh circumstances, the American workers and their allies have not been able to construct a powerful revolutionary movement. True, they have built, under infinite difficulties, a trade union movement of some 18 million members; the Negro people, 18 million strong, are the most militant section of the American working class, and have strong organizations; there are powerful farmer movements; also youth and women's movements, etc. These organized millions, despite unreliable leadership, and imperialist corruption policies on the part of the employers, are able to exercise a force which exerts a very considerable influence upon the course of the country.

They have not done so well ideologically, however, as organizationally. Marxist Socialism is very weak

among them; their predominant idea (pressed upon them by the tremendously powerful capitalist propaganda machine) is a confused sort of Rooseveltian Keynesim (People's Capitalism, the capitalist ideologues call it.) As American imperialism has made its tremendous progress, by semi-subjugating the other capitalist and undeveloped countries, this situation has grown worse. Thus, fifty years ago, about one-fourth of the trade union movement openly defended Marxism; now, if one should give the figure as ten percent (fringe unions) it would be putting it strong. There is no Labor Party in the United States, nor have the workers any other mass political organization of their own. In their overwhelming majority, insofar as they function politically at all, they go along with the two old capitalist parties, principally the Democratic Party, both controlled by the monopolists. The several Left parties are very weak. There is also no Social-Democratic Party at all, except a tiny sect of three or four thousand. The Trotskyites are also a tiny group, and of even less significance; and the Socialist Labor Party (DeLeon) also has but a very small fraction. In the recent elections, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party polled at least 40 million votes that should have gone to a Popular Front party, while the combined five Left-wing parties polled hardly one hundred thousand votes nationally.

From the foregoing pages, showing deficiencies of the American la-

bor movement, it would seem that this country is in an almost impossible position in fighting its way towards Socialism. But it would be a mistake to undersell the American working class. Despite its present poor showing in the period of full-blown American imperialism, it has a good fighting record. Besides, there is a new element entering into the picture, which we would do well not to overlook. This is the influence of the international democratic and Socialist fores upon the American situation. In many respects, this is of great importance to the American working masses. Take for instance, the situation of the Negro people; obviously the strong democratic influence of the world has compelled the United States capitalists to modify in very material respects their outrageous Jim-Crow system, which has been forced upon the Negro people for centuries past. Thus, in the United States Army, the government has been compelled to abolish the Jim-Crow system which separates troops into white and Negro regiments, as it would be impossible to bring troops of this segregated character into the modern democratic world outside of the United States without being severely condemned.

By the same token, the United States has been compelled by foreign democratic pressure to outlaw its purely white schools, hotels, buses, etc. and to admit Negroes to them, at least formally. Of course, every means is taken to evade these laws. It has also been compelled to put

a bridle upon the lynch murders of Negroes, which not so long ago were frequent and shocking occurrences. This foreign pressure in behalf of the Negroes has been an enormous factor in the American class struggle. By the same token, the American imperialists have been compelled to at least soften some of the hitherto unbridled exploitation and barbaric oppression of the white workers that were common in the United States, such as Ku-Klux-Klanism, McCarthyism, and the like. These foreign democratic tendencies, we may be sure, will become more and more prevalent, and more and more powerful. Undoubtedly, international democratic pressure gave considerable assistance to the resistance of the American workers in the recent defeat of menacing McCarthyism in the United States. The imperialists in the United States will find that in order to defend their barbaric system in the United States, they have to contend not only with the working forces in the United States, but increasingly on a world scale. The United States could not appear effectively as the leader of the "Democratic" world if it allowed such outrages to proceed unmolested in its own territory.

Throughout its history, the Communist Party did very much better than any other Left Party. It had ordinarily from three to ten times as many members, and vastly more influence, than all of them put together. This was because it was based upon Marxism-Leninism in its theory and

practice. Despite numerous mistakes made, our Party was incomparably more effective among the masses than the other parties. Around 1935 it reached a figure of approximately 80,000 members. About this time our Party began to meet with a series of disasters, the substance of which was a continuing attack by ruthless imperialism upon the Party. These disasters included: the expulsion from the CIO in 1940 of 11 Left unions with about one million members; the Browder revisionist Party leadership (which actually abolished the Party), and which cost the Party about 15,000 lost members; the violent war propaganda carried on by the government, many trade union leaders, etc., which adversely affected many members; the long government offensive against the Party (beginning about 1948), including the arrests and jailings of many leaders and the driving of the Party almost entirely underground, which cost the Party many thousands of members; a number of mistakes made by the Party, such as the formation of the Progressive Party in 1948, which also cost us many thousands of members; the effects of the Stalin Cult of the Individual, which seriously undermined Socialist propaganda in the United States; and also along the poisonous effects of American prosperity corruption, with its theory of American exceptionalism, and the like. Altogether, in 1955, the Party developed an acute crisis of revisionism, which almost destroyed the Party. This meant the loss of

many more thousands of members. As things stand now, our Party, with its membership reduced to a very low figure, is gradually recovering from the serious crisis, in which it has been living. In the main, the revisionists are defeated. Undoubtedly, American imperialism, with its many agents, has been trying to demolish the Party, but has failed.

The foregoing may give you some valid pictures of the situation in the United States, as well as indicate my own admiration of the splendid Chinese Communist Party under your leadership. I hope that, in spite of all difficulties, the time will come when I may be able to see you and become acquainted with you at first hand. I trust that your health is of the best. Please give my best regards to all your comrades.

Comradely yours,

WM. Z. FOSTER

P.S.—I am sorry that I cannot sign my name, since my right arm is still paralyzed.

MAO'S REPLY

Jan. 17, 1959

Dear Comrade Foster:

Thank you ever so much for your letter of December 10, 1958. From your letter, full of warmth and enthusiasm, I could see you, the soul of the great Communist Party of the United States, and the soul of the great working class and people of the United States.

The Chinese people know that United States imperialism has done

many bad things to China and to the whole world as well; they understand that only the United States ruling group is bad, while the people of the United States are very good. Among the American people, although many of them have not yet awakened, only a tiny part are bad, the overwhelming majority are good. Friendly relations between the Chinese and American peoples will eventually break down the barriers put up by Dulles and his like and develop more extensively with each passing day.

Although the Communist Party of the United States is temporarily in a situation which is none too smooth, your struggle is highly significant and is bound to bear rich fruit. Dark night has its end. The reactionary forces of the United States are now running their heads into stone walls everywhere, which shows that they will not have many days to rule. Right now, over there in your country, the situation in which "the enemy is strong and we are weak" is entirely a temporary phenomenon. It will certainly develop in the opposite direction.

Allow me, on behalf of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people, to extend hearty greetings to you, glorious fighter and leader of the American working class, and wish you an early recovery. I warmly welcome your coming to China for medical treatment and convalescence, if it is possible for you to do so.

With Communist greetings.